

Happy fall! We have a lot of good news to share with you in this latest edition.

Look no further than this front page to see our latest U.S. News and World Report Best Children's Hospitals rankings and the revitalization of our pediatric stem cell transplant (also known as bone marrow transplant) program.

You'll also find in these pages leading-edge research from our teams, awards and honors, and the grand opening of our Panda Cares Center, a new place of healing within our hospital for our children, which was made possible by Panda Express associates and guests.

As we head into the month of Thanksgiving, we want to thank all of our teams for all of the work that they do in support of our pediatric patients and their families. We continue to hear wonderful feedback from families within our 33-county coverage area and beyond about the excellent care and kindness that they have received here at UC Davis Children's Hospital and our clinics. It's a privilege to work with such a talented team and we just want to share our gratitude to you.



U.S. News & World Report names UC Davis Children's Hospital among best children's hospitals for 2024–2025

Hospital ranked in 5 specialties

[UC Davis Children's Hospital](#) has been recognized as a 2024–2025 [Best Children's Hospital](#) by [U.S. News & World Report](#).

The annual Best Children's Hospitals rankings, now in its 18th year, assist parents and caregivers, along with their physicians, in how to choose the best possible care for children with serious illnesses or complex medical needs.

UC Davis Children's Hospital is nationally ranked among the nation's 50 best in five specialty care areas:

- 23rd in nephrology
- 26th in neonatology
- 32nd in pediatric orthopedics, which was awarded in collaboration with Shriners Children's – Northern California, UC Davis Children's Hospital's longstanding partner in caring for children with burns, spinal cord injuries, orthopedic disorders and urological issues
- 36th nationally in pediatric pulmonology and lung surgery
- Top 50 in pediatric and adolescent behavioral health

Regionally, UC Davis Children's Hospital was ranked 7th in California and 8th in the Pacific Region, which includes Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon and Washington. [READ MORE »](#)



Life-saving stem cell transplant program revitalized

UC Davis Children's Hospital only provider in the region to offer the treatment, also called bone marrow transplant

Fourteen-year-old Faith Brown was greeted with bubbles and noise makers from exuberant doctors, nurses and staff, as she made her way to ring the bell.

Patients ring the bell when they've finished treatment for cancer or a transplant. In Faith's case, it was a stem cell transplant to treat a type of leukemia.

Faith grabbed the rope and rang the bell multiple times with a bright clang.

"Three cheers for the best feeling in the world," shouted Faith's mother Angie Evans, which was met with more clapping and cheering. [READ MORE »](#) [WATCH THE VIDEO »](#)



From left to right: Shinjiro Hirose, Satyan Lakshminrusimha and Brenda Chagolla

Virtual family-centered rounds help parents support their child's care



In a new study, researchers at [UC Davis Children's Hospital](#) have shown that virtual family-centered rounds are a valuable resource for families with children in the [neonatal intensive care unit \(NICU\)](#). The study was published in the journal [Telemedicine and e-Health](#). It showed that minority families, and those without college educations, particularly benefited. Overall, the virtual option

increased attendance and gave families enhanced opportunities to support their child's care.

"We found that virtual access really improved parent attendance," said [Jennifer Rosenthal](#), associate professor of [Pediatrics](#) and first author on the study. "Those increases were greatest for racial and ethnic minorities, families with no college education and people who lived in neighborhoods with poor health conditions. We are excited because adding this virtual option could overcome some of these inequities."

Previous research has shown that family-centered rounds boost parents' confidence in their children's care, increase parental engagement and improve objective outcomes, such as time spent in the hospital. The researchers reasoned that giving parents the option to use telehealth on their phone or computer to attend rounds remotely could improve attendance. [READ MORE »](#)

Telehealth visits can expand access to pediatric physiatry care

New study finds high quality of care, parent satisfaction in hybrid appointments for children

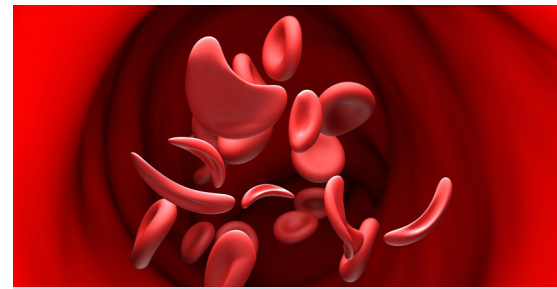
Pediatric physiatrists — doctors that treat conditions of the bones, muscles, joints, brain and nervous system — are in short supply in California's rural communities.

Also known as PM&R specialists, short for Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, their role is important: They oversee physical and occupational rehabilitation therapies, recommend medical equipment and identify children who may need surgical interventions.

But the shortage presents a barrier to care when insurance companies refuse to pay for the time needed for physiatrists to travel to remote areas, which in California can be 100 miles or more from the physiatrist's original location.



A [new study and report](#) from [UC Davis Health](#) researchers, published by the journal [Academic Pediatrics](#), explores telehealth appointments as an alternative to in-person physiatrist visits. The study specifically looked at the effectiveness of telehealth for children with [cerebral palsy](#) from the [California Children's Services Medical Therapy Program](#). The program is a network of multidisciplinary school-based care clinics that provide comprehensive medical care to nearly 23,000 children with special health care needs. [READ MORE »](#)



Stroke rates increasing in those with sickle cell disease, despite treatment efforts

A new study indicates the incidence of stroke continues to increase for adults and children living with sickle cell disease (SCD). Prior studies had shown rates of stroke had decreased in children after publication of the landmark [Stroke Prevention Trial in Sickle Cell Anemia \(STOP\)](#) study.

STOP was a landmark clinical trial published in 1998. The study demonstrated that chronic red blood cell transfusions decreased the incidence of events like strokes in high-risk children with SCD. These children were identified by abnormal blood flow as measured by a [Transcranial Doppler testing](#) (TCD), a type of brain ultrasound.

The [new study](#) determined more recent trends in rates of stroke amongst Californians living with SCD. It was led by [Ted Wun](#), associate dean for clinical and translational research at the [UC Davis School of Medicine](#), and was published in [Blood](#).

Individuals living with SCD, the most common inherited red blood cell disorder in the United States, are especially susceptible to [cerebrovascular events](#). This includes ischemic or hemorrhagic strokes, when a blood vessel leading to the brain is either blocked or bursts. It also includes [transient ischemic attacks](#), when blood flow temporarily stops in a blood vessel supplying the brain but does not cause long-term damage.

In a population-based study, Wun's team found that the risk of stroke increased with age, doubling for every 20 years of age. [READ MORE »](#)



Study shows donor kidneys with toxoplasma do not increase risks for transplant patients

Findings could help expand donor kidney supplies and shorten wait lists


A new study from [UC Davis Health](#) could help to increase the supply of donor kidneys.

Researchers have found that transplant patients who receive kidneys infected with the parasite toxoplasma have virtually the same outcomes as those who receive toxoplasma-negative organs.

Despite longstanding concerns, those who received kidneys from toxoplasma antibody positive donors (TPDs) had almost identical

mortality and rejection rates. The research was published in [Transplant International](#).

“Organs from donors who were positive for toxoplasma did just as well as organs from those who were negative, both for survival of the patients and survival of the kidneys,” said [Lavjay Butani](#), chief of [pediatric nephrology](#). He coauthored the paper with [Daniel Tancredi](#), professor of pediatrics. “This is quite encouraging.” [READ MORE »](#)



Research in 4 continents links outdoor air pollution to differences in children’s brains

Outdoor air pollution from power plants, fires and cars continues to degrade human, animal and environmental health around the globe. New research shows that even pollution levels that are below government air-quality standards are associated with differences in children’s brains.

A UC Davis research team systematically analyzed 40 empirical studies, the majority of which had found that outdoor air pollution is associated with differences in children’s brains. These differences include volumes of white matter, which is associated with cognitive function, connections throughout the brain and even early markers for Alzheimer’s.

The study, “Clearing the Air: A systematic review of studies on air pollution and childhood brain outcomes to mobilize policy change,” was published this month in [Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience](#).

“We’re seeing differences in brain outcomes between children with higher levels of pollution exposure versus lower levels of pollution exposure,” said [Camelia Hostinar](#), an associate professor of psychology and the study’s corresponding author. [READ MORE »](#)



New blood draw clinic meets needs of youth with autism and other neurodevelopmental conditions

“Neurodiverse patients get their blood drawn quite frequently because a lot of medications require close monitoring. As a parent, I can tell you this is an area that needs so much support. It really warms my heart that we can now offer this to patients and families.”

—Katharine Harlan Owens,
PATH Program patient navigator

Clinic is part of PATH program to make care more accessible

Blood draws can be stressful for children with autism, Down syndrome and other neurodevelopmental conditions. The new [PATH Glassrock Blood Draw Clinic](#) is dedicated to helping these patients have a safe and successful phlebotomy experience.

PATH stands for Promoting Accessibility to Healthcare. The new clinic is part of the PATH project funded by [Children’s Miracle Network at UC Davis](#) to improve care for children who are neurodivergent and their families.

The clinic is available to UC Davis Health patients 17 years and younger (or up to 18 if still in high school). Patients with neurodevelopmental conditions as well as those who benefit from additional support for medical anxiety are eligible.

The clinic is located in the [Glassrock](#) building on Stockton Boulevard and is open on Thursdays. It features phlebotomists and specialists from the [Child Life and Creative Arts Therapy Department](#). They were trained by [UC Davis MIND Institute](#) experts in how to care for patients with neurodevelopmental disabilities. [READ MORE »](#)



UC Davis Pediatric Echocardiography Lab earns reaccreditation

The three-year accreditation demonstrates the center's ongoing commitment to providing high-quality patient care in echocardiography. In addition to the Pediatric Heart Center at [UC Davis Children's Hospital](#), the following [UC Davis Health clinic locations](#) also received accreditation:

- **Cadillac Drive**, for pediatric and congenital transthoracic echocardiography
- **Roseville Clinic**, for pediatric and congenital transthoracic echocardiography, fetal echocardiography
- **Davis Clinic**, for pediatric and congenital transthoracic echocardiography
- **Stockton Clinic**, for fetal echocardiography

The accreditation process includes a detailed self-evaluation followed by a thorough review by a panel of medical experts. The process includes a review of both the critical operational and technical components of the facility, including representative case studies and their corresponding final reports. [READ MORE »](#)

Whitaker receives quality, safety and value grant

Pediatric orthopaedic surgeon [Amanda Whitaker](#), who is the UC Davis Department of Orthopaedic Surgery's chief value officer who oversees quality improvement initiatives and Patient-Reported Outcome Measures, was awarded a Quality, Safety, and Value Initiative grant by the Pediatric Orthopaedic Society of North America.

The project focuses on standardizing protocols for pain management after surgery. The goal is to avoid overuse and abuse of opioids, especially after large, complex procedures.

Pediatric Ophthalmology and Adult Strabismus Service update

It is a truly exciting time of growth, innovation and collaboration on the Pediatric Ophthalmology and Adult Strabismus service at the Tschannen Eye Center at UC Davis. The service has welcomed two new full-time faculty members:

- **Marcela Estrada** is a native of Lodi and joined the department in October 2020. She completed her ophthalmology training at the University of Washington and her pediatric ophthalmology training at the renowned Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.
- **Benjamin Jastrzembki** joined the department in May 2023. He completed his ophthalmology training at Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, and his fellowship training at the internationally acclaimed SickKids Hospital in Toronto.

Together they join Nandini Gandhi, who has been a part of the UC Davis department since September 2011, and currently serves as chief of the service.

The service is also supported by Tania Usner, a certified orthoptist, whose specialized training in eye movements help provide comprehensive care to patients.



Patient education will also be part of the effort, as will education for the whole health care team, including nurses, residents and adult and pediatric physicians.

Whitaker hopes that these efforts will optimize the prescribing of pain medication after surgery and improve the overall experience for the health care team and patients alike.

She will lead a quality improvement project on reducing opioid exposure and the number of opioids prescribed to children.

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UC Davis Children’s Hospital opens Panda Cares Center of Hope

Dedicated space will address the mental, physical and spiritual health of children

UC Davis Children’s Hospital is proud to announce the opening of its Panda Cares Center of Hope, made possible by Panda Express associates and guests.

The Panda Cares Center of Hope will promote healing by providing specially curated programs that address each child’s entire well-being, including their mental, emotional, physical and spiritual needs. This will include therapeutic play, art therapy, music therapy and academic enrichment, all designed to give children courage and strength through their hospitalization.

“Our staff have historically believed that we are more than just our space,” said Diana Sundberg, manager of the UC Davis Child Life and Creative Arts Therapy Department. “However, we have never had a room such as this, and we can’t help but dream about what opportunities the Panda Cares Center of Hope will open for our children, families and staff.” [READ MORE](#) » [WATCH THE VIDEO](#) »

UC Davis Children’s Hospital receives \$8M estate gift

Small baby unit, pediatric pulmonology, GI and cardiac care programs will be supported

Four UC Davis Children’s Hospital programs will be supported by an \$8 million gift from the estate of Victor and Phela Vesci, who passed away in 2009 and 2022, respectively.

“This was a transformational gift. I believe this is the largest single individual gift ever given to UC Davis Children’s Hospital,” said Satyan Lakshminrusimha, chair of pediatrics and physician-in-chief at UC Davis Children’s Hospital. “On behalf of our team, we are so grateful to the Vescis for their generous spirit of philanthropy. Their legacy will live on in the programs and pediatric patients that we are proud to serve.”

The \$8 million gift will be used to support the following:

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit: A small baby unit now provides dedicated care for infants who are born less than 27 weeks gestation or weigh less than 2.2 pounds.

Pediatric Critical Care: This funding will support children in the Pediatric and Cardiac Intensive Care Unit, as well as the Pediatric Heart Center.

Gastroenterology: This gift will allow the pediatric GI division to purchase new diagnostic technology to support the growth of its neurogastroenterology (the neurology of the body’s GI tract, liver, gallbladder and pancreas), motility, and inflammatory bowel disease programs.

Pulmonology: The funds will be used to start comprehensive pulmonary function testing and sleep apnea testing programs. This will improve the access to care for pediatric pulmonology patients and will enhance the quality of care provided to children from the region with various pulmonary and sleep-related problems. [READ MORE](#) »

Stuffed animal donations needed for hospitalized children

The public is invited to donate new stuffed animals for patients at UC Davis Children's Hospital.

The UC Davis Child Life and [Creative Arts Therapy Department](#) is accepting donations through its dedicated [Amazon Wish List](#). Items range in price from \$11.95 to \$16. The gifts ordered online can be shipped directly to the children's hospital as noted on the Amazon checkout page.

"Stuffed animals can help reduce the stress and anxiety that comes with hospitalization," said Katie MacDonald, programming supervisor at UC Davis Children's Hospital. "We are thankful to our community in advance for helping to provide these comfort items for our children."



UC Davis Children's Hospital provides life-saving care to Lodi baby



It was July of 2020. Lodi residents Katy Eyer and her husband, Paul, were awaiting the arrival of their first baby. A girl.

"The pandemic had just started," recalled Eyer. "It was a strange time to have a baby."

Genetic testing did not reveal any concerns with the developing baby. But Eyer had been diagnosed with placenta previa — a condition where the placenta attaches low in the uterus. This can cause severe

bleeding in the mother before, during or after delivery, so a C-section was scheduled at their local hospital in Lodi.

"We went in on a Monday morning for the C-section, and everything went well, but the baby was having a hard time breathing," Eyer said. "They whisked her away to the NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) to figure out what was going on while they fixed me up. Paul went with them."

An unexpected diagnosis

Not only was the baby, whom the Eyers named Ruthie, having difficulty breathing, but the care team advised her parents that she had some markers for Down syndrome or Turner syndrome.

"It was so strange since everything was normal on her prenatal testing," Eyer said.

Ruthie's care team put her on a CPAP, a machine that uses mild air pressure to keep the windpipe open. But she still wasn't breathing well. [READ MORE »](#)

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